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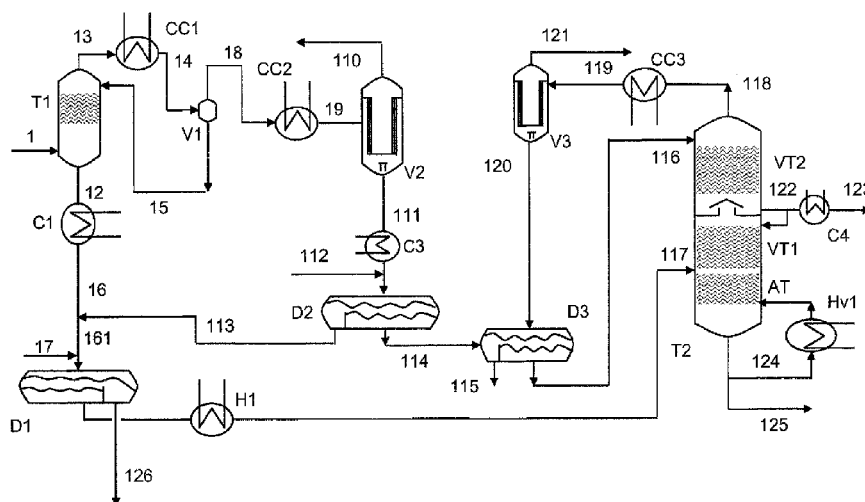
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- ABSTRACT**

- The invention relates to a process for purifying aniline produced by gas-phase hydrogenation of nitrobenzene, by fractional condensation of the crude reaction product obtained in gaseous form so that at least two liquid process products, a partial condensate (PK) and a total condensate (TK), are obtained.

- 16 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets**

- (58) **Field of Classification Search**

- CPC combination set(s) only.  
See application file for complete search history.



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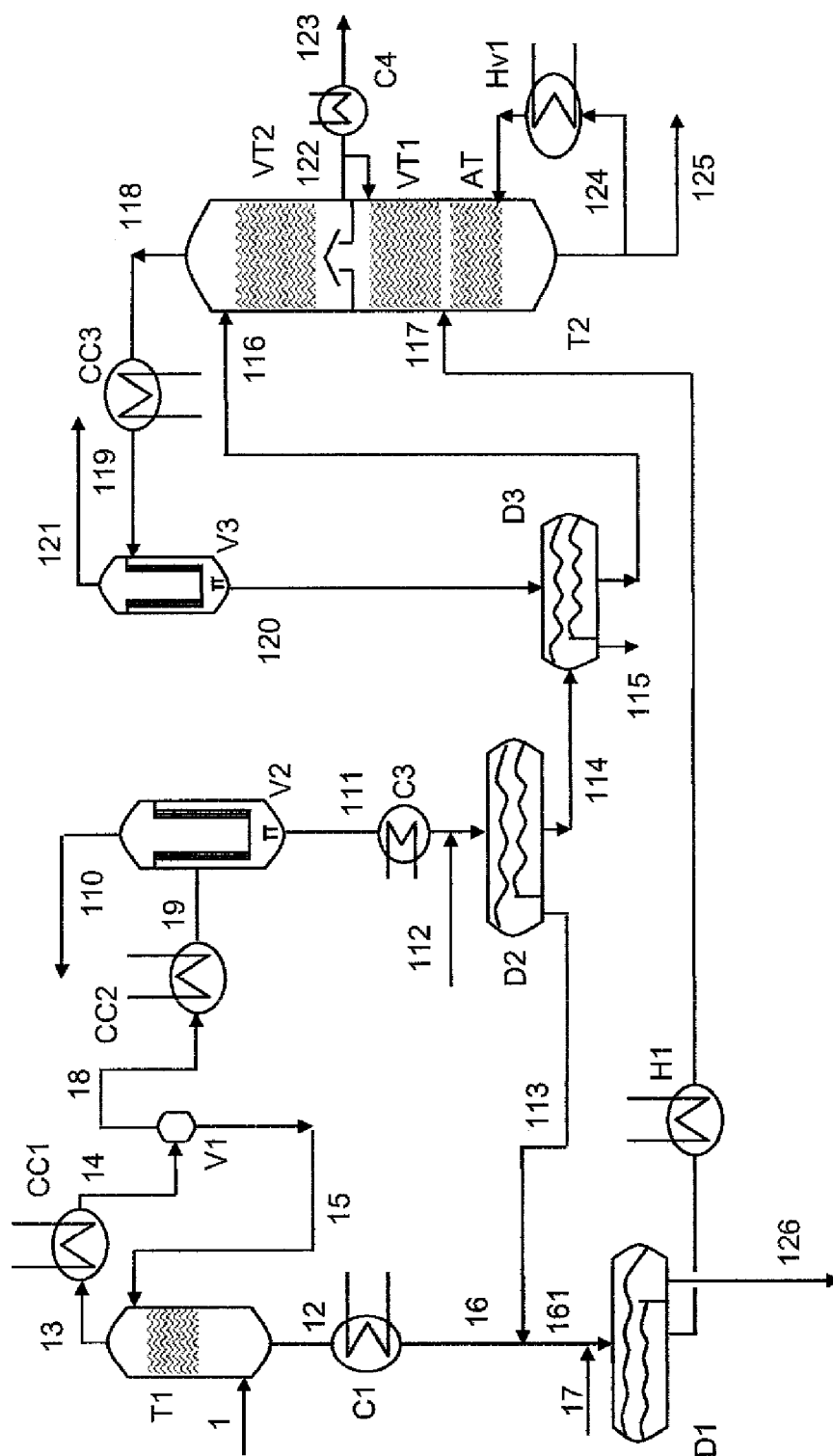


Figure 1

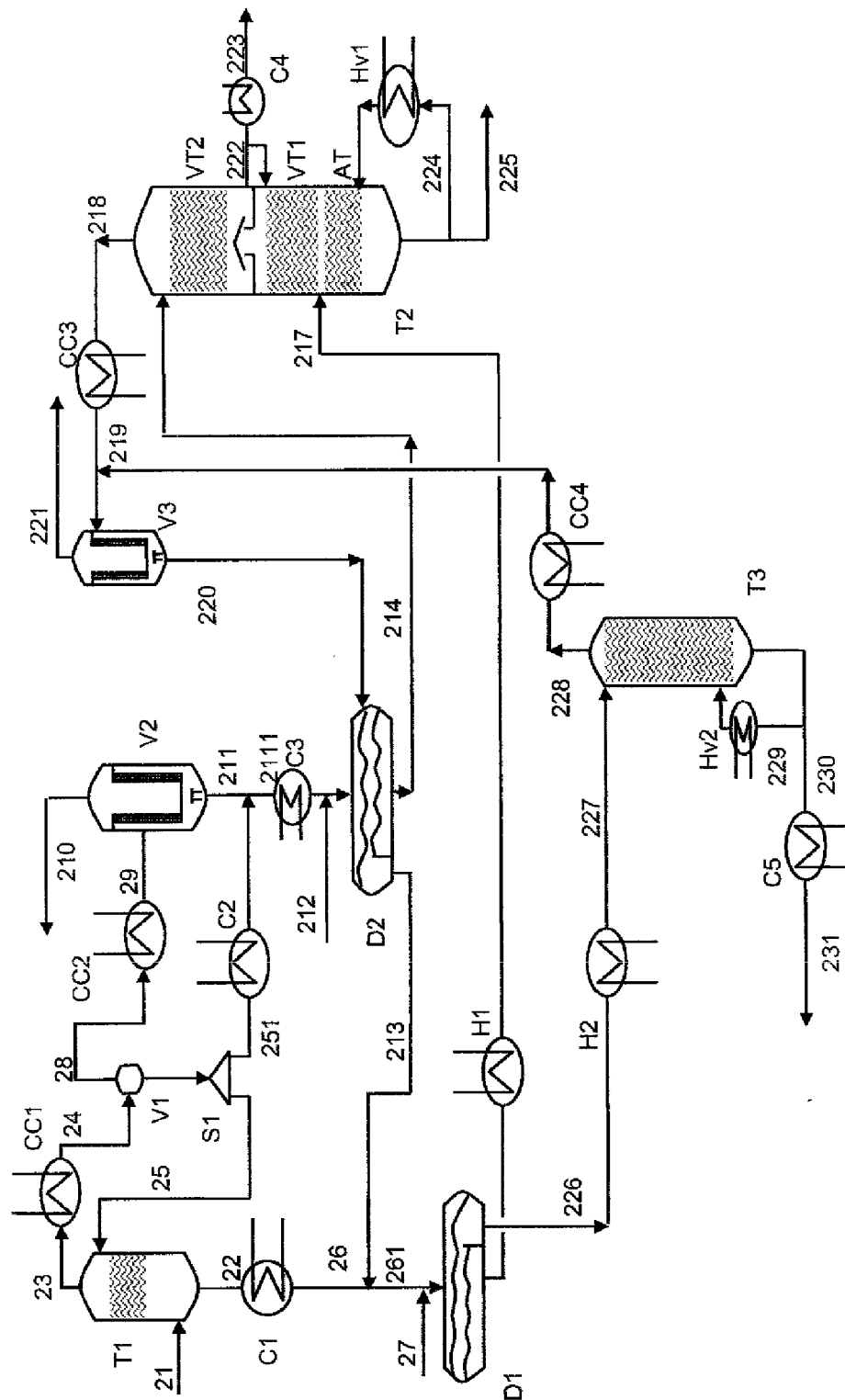


Figure 2

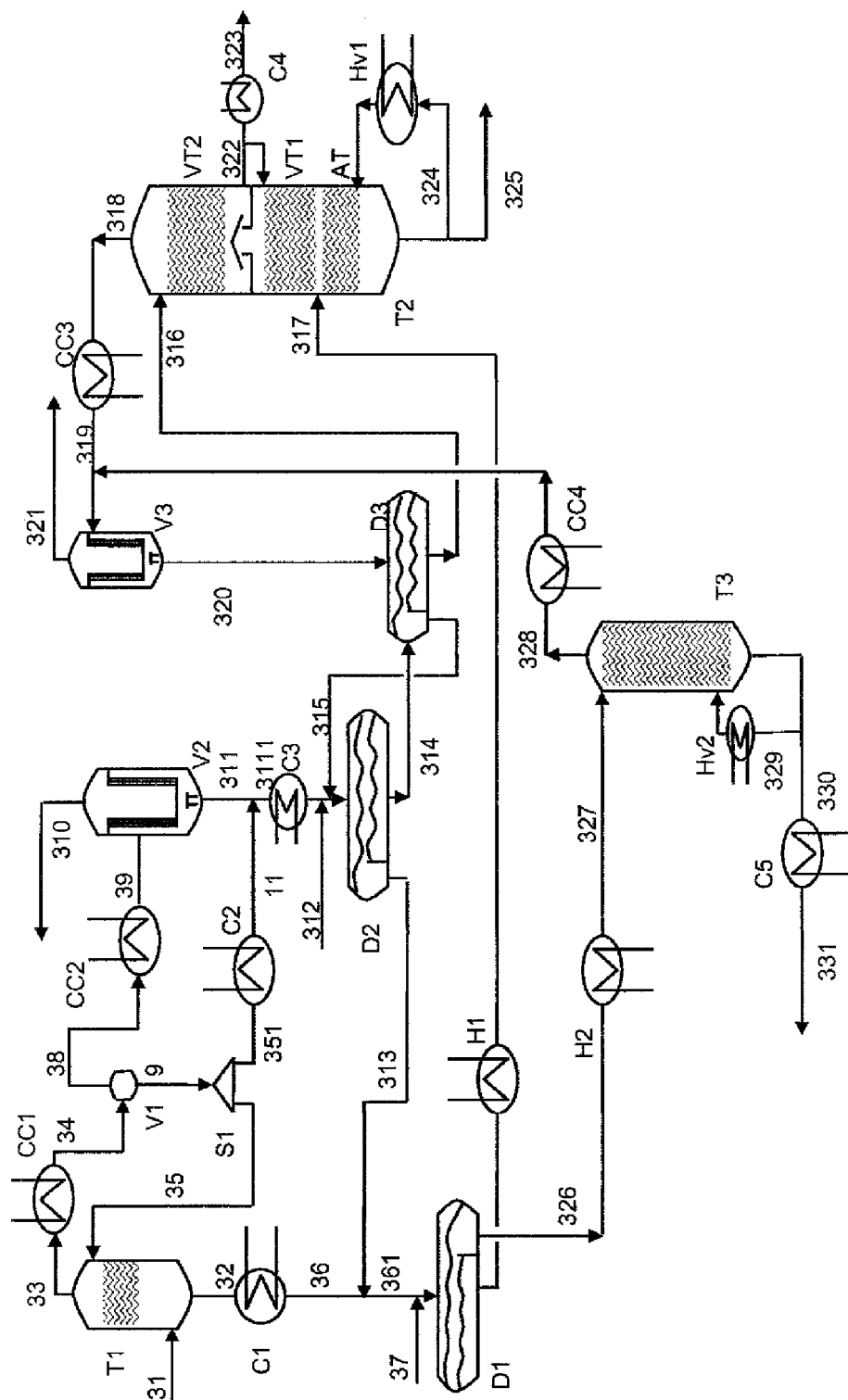


Figure 3

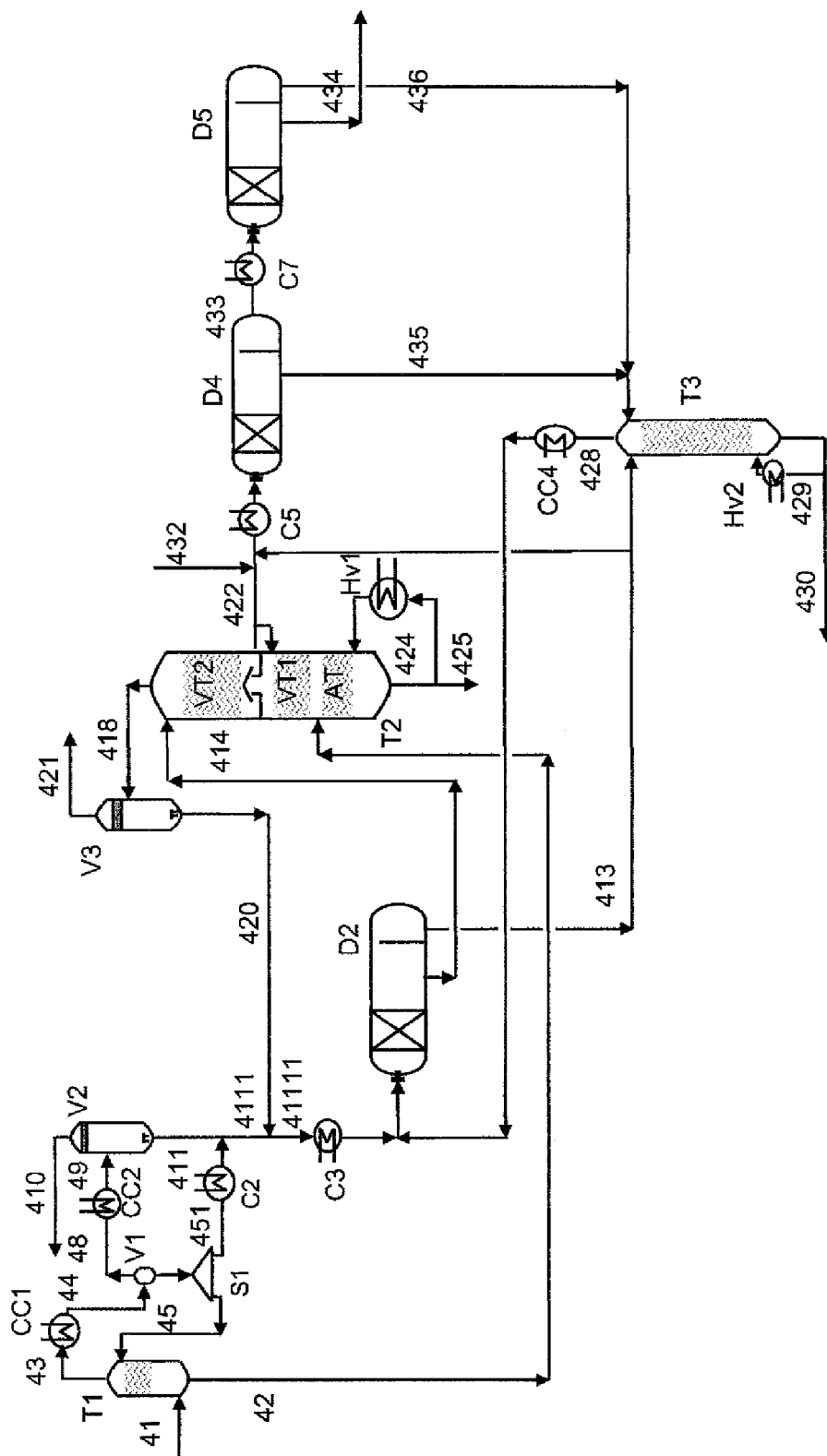


Figure 4

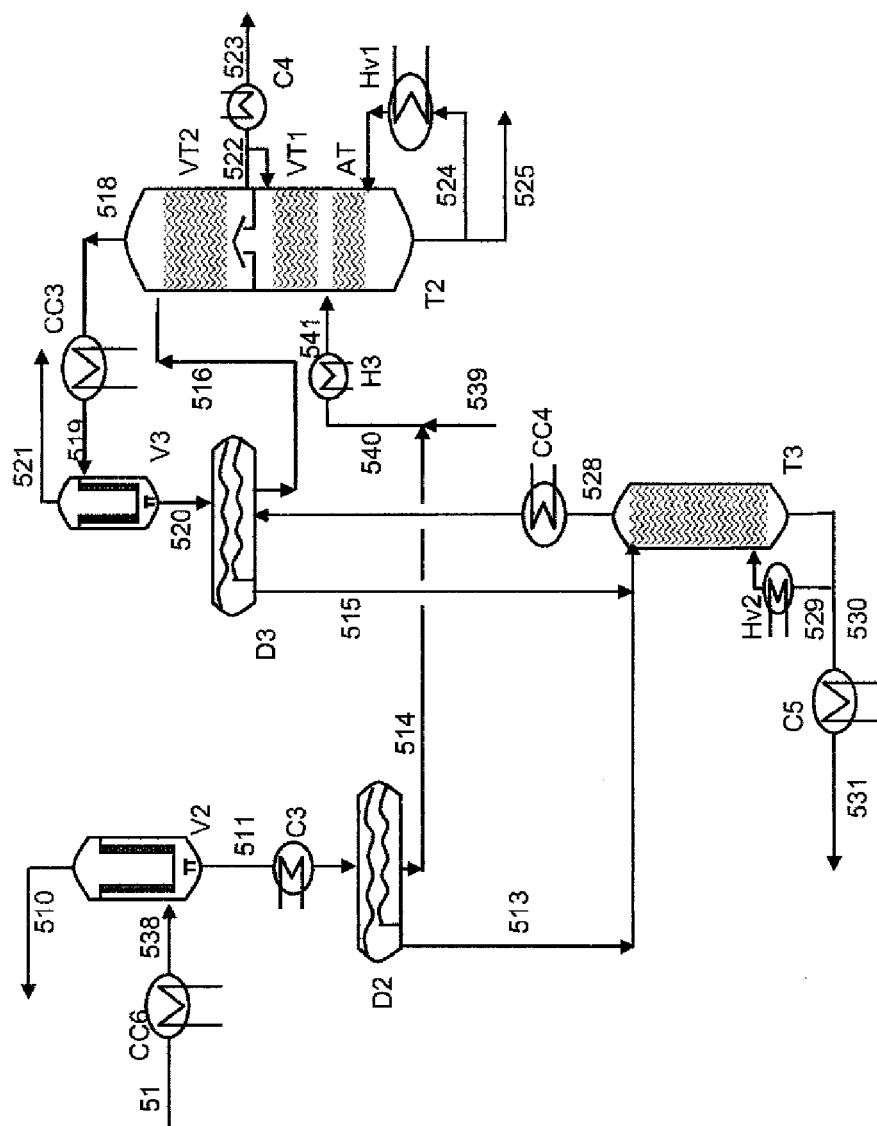


Figure 5

## PROCESS FOR PURIFYING ANILINE FROM GAS PHASE HYDROGENATIONS

### CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a §371 National Stage Application of PCT/EP2011/068122, filed Oct. 17, 2011, which claims priority to German Application No. 102010042731.4, filed Oct. 21, 2010.

### BACKGROUND

#### 1. Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a process for purifying aniline produced by gas-phase hydrogenation of nitrobenzene, by fractional condensation of the crude reaction product obtained in gaseous form so that at least two liquid process products, a partial condensate (PK) and a total condensate (TK), are obtained, wherein the condensation leading to the formation of PK is carried out at higher condensation than the temperature leading to the formation of TK, a product stream originating from PK and a product stream originating from TK are each passed separately from one another into a distillation column consisting of at least one stripping section and at least one rectifying section, wherein the product stream originating from PK is introduced into the lower section of the distillation column between the lowermost stripping section and the section which follows, and the product stream originating from TK is introduced into the top of the distillation column above the uppermost rectifying section, and the desired purified aniline is withdrawn in a side stream between the lowermost stripping section and the uppermost rectifying section of the distillation column.

#### 2. Description of Related Art

Aromatic amines are important intermediates, which must be available inexpensively and in large amounts. Aniline, an aromatic amine which is of particular importance industrially, can be purified in an outstanding manner by the process according to the invention. Aniline is an important intermediate in the production of di- and poly-isocyanates of the diphenylmethane series (MDI) and is produced on an industrial scale generally by catalytic hydrogenation of nitrobenzene. Installations with very large capacities must be constructed for that purpose in order to be able to cover the enormous worldwide requirement. The hydrogenation of nitrobenzene is preferably carried out in the gas phase on stationary, heterogeneous supported catalysts, such as, for example, Pd on aluminium oxide or carbon supports, in fixed-bed reactors at an absolute pressure of from 2 to 50 bar and a temperature in the range from 250 to 500° C. under adiabatic conditions in gas recycle mode; see EP-A-0 696 573, EP-A-0 696 574 and EP-A-1 882 681. "Gas recycle mode" means that the non-condensable gases (that is to say substantially hydrogen not reacted during the hydrogenation and any added inert gases) contained in the crude reaction product, optionally with the exception of small amounts diverted off to keep constant further gaseous components of the recycle gas—such as, for example, ammonia formed on the catalyst by deamination reactions, are fed back into the reaction.

In the production of aniline, water and organic secondary products are also formed in addition to the target product. Amounts of unreacted nitrobenzene may additionally also be present, depending upon the production process. Such organic secondary components, as well as any unreacted nitrobenzene, must be separated off before the aniline is used further. The organic secondary components and any unre-

acted nitrobenzene can be divided into two groups: a) the group of the "low boilers", that is to say compounds or azeotropically boiling mixtures of individual components having boiling points below that of aniline (b.p.=184° C.), and b) the group of the "high boilers", that is to say compounds or azeotropically boiling mixtures of individual components having boiling points above that of aniline. Nitrobenzene (b.p.=211° C.) accordingly belongs to the group of the high boilers.

A crude product stream of a gas-phase hydrogenation installation of nitrobenzene accordingly generally comprises: aniline,

process water (i.e. the sum of water formed in the reaction and water optionally added to the starting gas stream), non-condensable gases (excess hydrogen—optionally containing gaseous impurities such as, for example, methane, carbon oxides—and optionally added inert gases, for example for improving the selectivity of added nitrogen, see EP-A-1 882 681, and optionally gaseous secondary products, for example ammonia from deamination reactions),

low boilers, and

high boilers (which can optionally also contain amounts of unreacted nitrobenzene).

An example of the group of the low boilers is benzene (b.p.=80° C.), and an example of the group of the high boilers is diphenylamine (b.p.=302° C.). The aniline can easily be separated from those two impurities mentioned as examples because their boiling points are very different from that of aniline ( $\Delta T_s=104$  K and 118 K). On the other hand, it is precisely the high boilers which, after condensation of the product, make it necessary to evaporate and condense the aniline again, so that their presence is particularly problematical.

A particular difficulty is in addition the separation of those secondary products whose boiling points are very similar to those of aniline, because the outlay in terms of distillation is considerable here. In this context, the separation of phenol (b.p.=182° C.) represents a major challenge for distillation technology, which is reflected in the use of long distillation columns with a large number of plates and high reflux ratios, with a correspondingly high outlay in terms of investment and energy.

Compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups, that is to say compounds that carry at least one hydroxy group (—OH) directly on an aromatic ring, can generally be problematical in the working-up of aniline. In addition to phenol, which has already been mentioned, particular mention may be made of the various aminophenols.

The purification of aniline is therefore not a trivial matter and has considerable industrial importance. Many approaches address in particular the mentioned problem in connection with compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups. The solution consists in converting the compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups into the corresponding salts by reaction with suitable bases, the salts, as non-volatile compounds, being substantially easier to separate off.

JP-A-49-035341, US-A-2005 080294, EP-A-1 845 079 and EP-A-2-028 176 accordingly disclose processes in which an aromatic amine is distilled in the presence of a base. In that procedure, problems of solids deposition, fouling and/or a pronounced rise in viscosity in the distillation must be prevented by complex and/or expensive measures.

As an alternative to the removal of compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups from aniline during the distillation, JP-A-08-295654 describes an extraction with dilute aqueous alkali hydroxide solution. Disadvantages of that process are



the high NaOH consumption and the formation—as a result of the low concentration of the alkali hydroxide solutions—of very large amounts of waste water containing alkali phenolate.

EP-A-1 845 080 describes a process for the purification of aniline by extraction with aqueous alkali metal hydroxide solution having a concentration >0.7% by mass, wherein the concentration and temperature are so adjusted that the aqueous phase always represents the lower phase in the subsequent phase separation.

JP-A-2007217405 describes a process in which the phenol-containing aniline is brought into contact with aqueous alkali metal hydroxide solution at least twice, in such a manner that the concentration of alkali metal hydroxide in the aqueous phase is from 0.1% by mass to 0.7% by mass.

JP-A-2005 350388 relates very generally to the improvement of aniline working-up. A process is described in which a portion of the bottom product of the aniline distillation column is discharged therefrom and converted into the gas phase separately, that is to say in a second evaporator which is different from the actual evaporator of the column. The gas phase so obtained is fed back into the pure aniline column; high boiler fractions that cannot be evaporated are separated off. A disadvantage of that process is that low boilers and water must be separated off upstream of the actual aniline distillation column by an additional distillation in a dewatering column in a process that is complex in terms of apparatus.

None of the mentioned publications discusses how to reduce the proportion of aniline that must be evaporated and condensed again in a distillation process. If the aniline to be purified is from a gas-phase process, it even passes through two condensations according to the prior art: the reaction product obtained in gaseous form is first condensed as completely as possible, the aqueous phase is separated off, and the resulting organic phase is distilled, that is to say the desired product is (i) condensed, (ii) evaporated and (iii) condensed again, which is very expensive in terms of energy and apparatus and leads to considerable thermal stresses on the aniline.

Accordingly, it was an object of the present invention to provide a process for purifying aniline from gas-phase hydrogenations, in which only a minimal proportion of the aniline itself must be evaporated and condensed again and in which the separation of compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups is achieved as effectively as possible with minimal losses of valuable aniline.

### SUMMARY

The object has been achieved by a process for the production of aniline by gas-phase hydrogenation of nitrobenzene and subsequent purification of the aniline, wherein there is obtained a gaseous crude reaction product consisting of aniline, process water, non-condensable gases, low boilers and high boilers, which reaction product is subjected to fractional condensation so that at least two, preferably exactly two, liquid process products, namely at least one, preferably one, partial condensate (PK) and a total condensate (TK), are obtained, wherein

the condensation leading to the formation of PK is carried out at a higher temperature than the condensation leading to the formation of TK, PK comprises the major proportion of the high boilers, while TK comprises the major proportion of the low boilers as well as the major proportion of the aniline and the major proportion of the process water, characterised in that

a product stream originating from PK and a product stream originating from TK are passed into a distillation column

comprising at least two sections, namely at least one stripping section (AT) and at least one rectifying section (VT), wherein the product stream originating from PK is introduced into the lower section of the distillation column between the lowermost stripping section and the section which follows, and the product stream originating from TK is introduced into the top of the distillation column above the uppermost rectifying section, and wherein

distilled aniline is withdrawn in a side stream between the lowermost stripping section and the uppermost rectifying section of the distillation column.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1-5 depict embodiments of the present invention

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The process is explained in the following by means of the preferred embodiment, which relates to the formation of exactly two condensate streams (PK and TK). It is a simple matter for the person skilled in the art to modify this process so that it comprises more than two condensate streams, for example by providing a plurality of partial condensation stages PK<sub>1</sub>, PK<sub>2</sub>, etc. upstream of the last condensation stage (TK), which is as complete as possible.

In the simplest embodiment of the process according to the invention, the product stream originating from PK is the partial condensate obtained in the fractional condensation, that is to say it is identical with PK itself, and the product stream originating from TK is the organic phase which is obtained by phase separation of TK or of a process product comprising TK, obtained by combining TK with further product streams (see FIG. 4 and the associated explanations), into an aqueous phase and an organic phase.

Depending upon the precise separation task (i.e. ultimately upon the secondary product spectrum, which varies according to the production process), it may be advantageous to treat the aniline with base in order to remove acidic impurities, in particular the mentioned compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups, even more completely than would otherwise be possible. In such a case, the product stream originating from PK is preferably an organic phase which is obtained after mixing PK or a process product comprising PK, obtained by combining PK with further product streams (see FIGS. 1 to 3 and the associated explanations), with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and an organic phase. Analogously, the product stream originating from TK is in such a case preferably an organic phase which is obtained after mixing TK or a process product comprising TK (see FIGS. 2 to 3 and the associated explanations) with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and an organic phase.

Particularly preferably, in this embodiment PK or the process product comprising PK, before, during or after mixing with aqueous base solution, is additionally mixed in a single- or multi-stage process with water or with a stream A comprising at least 50% by mass water, preferably at least 80% by mass water, particularly preferably at least 90% by mass water, based on the total mass of stream A, in order to reduce the salt load of the product stream originating from PK as far as possible. Most particularly preferably, stream A is an aqueous phase which is obtained after mixing TK or a process product comprising TK with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and an organic phase.

It is likewise preferred additionally to mix TK or the process product comprising TK, before, during or after mixing with aqueous base solution (but before phase separation), in a single- or multi-stage process with water or with a stream B comprising at least 50% by mass water, preferably at least 80% by mass water, particularly preferably at least 90% by mass water, based on the total mass of stream B. Alternatively, it is also possible to wash the organic phase obtained after mixing TK or a process product comprising TK with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation in a single- or multi-stage process with water or with a stream B comprising at least 50% by mass water, preferably at least 80% by mass water, particularly preferably at least 90% by mass water. In both cases, there is used as stream B preferably a liquid condensate stream of the gas phase removed at the top of the distillation column or a process product comprising a liquid condensate stream of the gas phase removed at the top of the distillation column. A "process product comprising a liquid condensate stream of the gas phase removed at the top of the distillation column" is most particularly preferably a process product that is obtained by adding an aniline-water azeotropic mixture (which is in turn obtained by introducing into a water stripper an aqueous phase obtained by phase separation after mixing PK or a process product comprising PK with aqueous base solution) to the total condensate of the gas phase removed at the top of the distillation column.

Alternatively, the treatment of the aniline with aqueous base solution can also take place after the distillation. In that embodiment, the product stream originating from PK is preferably identical with PK itself, and the product stream originating from TK is preferably the organic phase which is obtained by phase separation of a process product comprising TK (see FIG. 4 and the associated explanations) into an aque-

ous phase and an organic phase. The aniline withdrawn from the distillation column in a side stream is mixed with aqueous base solution, and an aniline depleted of acidic impurities is obtained by a phase separation.

A distillation column according to the invention comprises at least two sections, a stripping section and a rectifying section. In the simplest case, therefore, the product stream originating from PK is introduced between those two sections, and the product stream originating from TK is passed into the top of the column above the rectifying section. If the distillation column comprises more than two sections, then the product stream originating from PK is preferably introduced between the lowermost stripping section and the section which follows, which is generally a rectifying section. In the case of three sections (see figures), AT (=lowermost stripping section, the only stripping section in this embodiment), VT1 (=rectifying section following AT) and VT2 (=uppermost rectifying section), the product stream originating from TK is introduced between AT and VT1, and the product stream originating from PK is introduced into the top of the column above VT2. The number of sections can also be greater than three.

A possible embodiment of the process according to the invention is explained in greater detail in the following by means of FIG. 1.

In the Figures:

(In this specification, the first number of a reference numeral of a material stream indicates the associated figure. In the case of identical or comparable material streams from different embodiments of the invention, the numbers following the first numbers of the reference numeral in question are the same.)

TABLE 1

Reference numerals of FIG. 1			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
11	Gaseous crude reaction product (crude aniline)	T1	Washer for dividing the crude aniline stream into PK and TK
12	Liquid process product (PK) discharged from T1	CC1	Condenser
13	Top product from T1	V1	Separator
14	13 after passing through CC1	CC2	Condenser
15	Liquid product stream fed back into the top of T1	V2	Separator
16	12 after passing through C1	C3	Cooler
161	16 after mixing with 113 (161 = "process product comprising PK")	D2	Decanter
17	Aqueous base solution for treating PK or a process product comprising PK	C1	Cooler
18	Top product from V1	D1	Decanter
19	18 after passing through CC2	H1	Preheater
110	Top product from V2	D3	Decanter
111	Liquid process product (TK) discharged from V2	T2	Distillation column
112	Aqueous base solution for treating TK or a process product comprising TK	AT	Stripping section
113	Aqueous phase from D2	VT1	Upper rectifying section
114	Organic phase from D2	VT2	Middle rectifying section
115	Aqueous phase from D3	Hv1	Evaporator
116	Organic phase from D3	C4	Cooler
117	Organic phase from D1	CC3	Condenser
118	Gas phase removed at the top of T2	V3	Separator
119	118 after passing through CC2 (total condensate of 118)		
120	Liquid condensate stream removed at the bottom of V3		

TABLE 1-continued

Reference numerals of FIG. 1			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
121	Top product from V3		
122	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2		
123	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2 after passing through C4		
124	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv1		
125	Discharged bottom runnings from T2		
126	Aqueous phase from D1		

The gaseous reaction product, stream **11**, consisting of aniline, process water, non-condensable gases, low boilers and high boilers, is first passed into the washer **T1**. Stream **13** is withdrawn at the top of **T1** and cooled in the condenser **CC1** to a temperature of from 60° C. to 160° C., preferably from 80° C. to 140° C. and particularly preferably from 100° C. to 120° C. (condensation leading to the formation of **PK**). The absolute pressure is from 1 bar to 50 bar, preferably from 2 bar to 20 bar and particularly preferably from 2 bar to 10 bar.

The stream **14** so obtained is separated in the separator **V1** into a gaseous phase and a liquid phase. The stream **15** fed back into the top of **T1** is in this embodiment the liquid phase removed at the bottom of **V1**. There is thus formed in **T1** a liquid process product (**PK**) enriched with high boilers, which is removed at the bottom (stream **12**). As well as comprising the high boilers (preferably from 90% by mass to 100% by mass of the high boilers contained in stream **11**), stream **12** (**PK**) also comprises fractions of aniline (preferably from 0.1% by mass to 35% by mass of the aniline contained in stream **11**), of low boilers (preferably <1% by mass of the low boilers contained in stream **11**) and of process water (preferably <5% by mass of the process water contained in stream **H**). Stream **12**, preferably after passing through a cooler **C1** (then stream **16**), is mixed in a single- or multi-stage process with aqueous base solution **17** and with water (not shown) or with a stream **A** (preferably stream **113**) comprising at least 50% by mass, preferably at least 80% by mass, particularly preferably at least 90% by mass, water and fed to the decanter **D1**. Mixing with water or with a stream comprising at least 50% by mass water can take place before, at the same time as or after mixing with base solution, preferably after.

All water-soluble basic compounds are suitable in principle for the production of the aqueous base solutions according to the invention, such as, for example, alkali metal or alkaline earth metal hydroxides, carbonates or hydrogen carbonates. A solution of sodium hydroxide in water is preferably used as the base solution, the content by mass of sodium hydroxide being preferably at least 10%, particularly preferably at least 20% and most particularly preferably at least 30%, based on the total mass of the sodium hydroxide solution. Extremely particularly preferably, commercially available 32% sodium hydroxide solution is used. The molar ratio of base to the sum of all phenolic hydroxy groups is at least 1:1, but a molar excess of base is preferably used. A molar excess of base to the sum of all phenolic hydroxy groups of not more than 20:1, preferably of not more than 15:1 and particularly preferably of not more than 10:1 is maintained. In the case of multi-stage base treatments, that molar ratio is preferably maintained in each stage. In order to be able to establish the desired molar ratio of base to the sum of all

phenolic hydroxy groups, the composition of the process stream that is to be treated must be known. It is determined by conventional analytical methods, preferably by gas chromatography. The details given above relating to the nature and amount of the base that is to be used apply to all embodiments of the process according to the invention. The two-phase process product obtained by base treatment and washing with water is subjected in the decanter **D1** to a phase separation known to the person skilled in the art, wherein salts (excess base and salts of the compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups) remain predominantly to completely in the aqueous phase. The aqueous phase (stream **126**) is preferably fed to a waste-water treatment, particularly preferably a waste-water stripper.

The gaseous stream **18** removed from the top of **V1** is condensed in the condenser **CC2** so that a liquid process product (condensation leading to the formation of **TK**) forms in addition to a residual gas phase. The condensation temperature is governed by economic boundary conditions: too high a temperature leads to undesirable product losses, too low a temperature leads to an unacceptable energy outlay for the condensation. The condensation temperature that is actually chosen therefore represents a compromise and is preferably from 25° C. to 90° C., particularly preferably from 30° C. to 80° C. and most particularly preferably from 40° C. to 70° C. In this process step, not only aniline condenses; water and low boilers also condense, as well as optionally small amounts of entrained high boilers. The absolute pressure is from 1 bar to 50 bar, preferably from 2 bar to 20 bar and particularly preferably from 2 bar to 10 bar.

The stream **19** leaving **CC2** is passed into the separator **V2** in order to separate the liquid phase and the gaseous phase. The gaseous phase, which contains the excess hydrogen from the reaction, is preferably fed back into the nitroaromatic compound reduction as recycle gas (stream **110**). The liquid process product (**TK**) removed as stream **111**, preferably after passing through a further cooler **C3**, is mixed in a single- or multi-stage process with base solution (stream **112**), the same type of base solution as in stream **17** preferably being used and the molar excess of base preferably being the same as in the base treatment of stream **12** or (in the preferred embodiment) stream **16**. Analysis of the stream that is to be treated with base preferably takes place by the same method as in the case of stream **12** or (in the preferred embodiment) stream **16**. In addition to the major amount of the aniline (preferably from 65% by mass to 99.9% by mass of the aniline contained in stream **11**), the major amount of the low boilers (preferably from 99% by mass to 100% by mass of the low boilers contained in stream **11**) and the major amount of the process water (preferably from 95% by mass to 100% by mass of the

process water contained in stream 11), stream 111 (TK) can also contain small amounts of entrained high boilers (preferably <10% by mass of the high boilers contained in stream 11). The two-phase process product is then subjected in the decanter D2 to a phase separation known to the person skilled in the art. The aqueous phase thereby obtained comprises the salts of the compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups as well as excess base partially to completely. The aqueous phase is discharged from D2 (stream 113). In a particularly preferred embodiment of the process according to the invention, the stream 113 is preferably used as stream A comprising at least 50% by mass water for washing the stream 16 before, during or after the base treatment of stream 16.

The alkaline treatment in the decanter D2 can be carried out as a single- or multi-stage treatment with aqueous base solution 112. The organic phase obtained by the phase separation in D2 is discharged from D2 (stream 114) and preferably, in order to remove also the final residues of salts, washed in a single- or multi-stage process with water (not shown in FIG. 1) or a stream B (=120) comprising at least 50% by mass water, preferably at least 80% by mass water, particularly preferably at least 90% by mass water. The two-phase process product obtained in that manner is subjected in the decanter D3 to a phase separation known to the person skilled in the art. Washing in the decanter D3 can be carried out as a single- or multi-stage washing. The aqueous phase from the washing (stream 115) is discharged in this embodiment and can then preferably be fed to a further process stage (not shown) in which stream 115 is purified further and the aniline contained in that stream is recovered. Aqueous fractions that remain are fed to waste-water disposal.

The distillation column T2 preferably consists of an upper rectifying section, a middle rectifying section and a lower stripping section, as well as an evaporator Hv1.

The product stream originating from PK, which is introduced into the lower section of the distillation column T2 between the lowermost stripping section and the section which follows, is in this embodiment the organic phase obtained in D1. It is preferably heated in the preheater H1 to from 100° C. to 180° C. and then introduced into T2 (stream 117).

The product stream originating from TK, which is introduced into the top of the distillation column T2 above the uppermost rectifying section, is in this embodiment the organic phase obtained in D3 (stream 116). Stream 116 preferably has a temperature of from 30° C. to 60° C.

The aniline is withdrawn from the distillation column as a side stream (122). A portion of the aniline (preferably from 10% by mass to 80% by mass, particularly preferably from 20% by mass to 50% by mass of the stream 122) is preferably fed back into the distillation column in order to maintain the gas stream therein at a level that allows the low boilers to be separated off sufficiently. The portion of the aniline that is not fed back is preferably cooled further in the cooler C4 and withdrawn as a pure aniline stream 123.

The stream 18 withdrawn at the top comprises, in addition to fractions of aniline, low boilers and residual water, because water cannot be separated off completely in the decanters owing to a certain degree of solubility in the organic phase. After passing through the condenser CC3, stream 119 is fed into V3, where a water-rich condensate (stream 120) is removed at the bottom. In a particularly preferred embodiment of the process according to the invention, that water-rich stream 120 is preferably used for washing the stream 114. In that embodiment, therefore, the organic phase obtained after mixing the product stream originating from TK with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation is washed in a single- or multi-stage process with water or with a stream comprising at least 50% by mass water. The gas stream (121) removed at the top of V3 is fed to a waste-gas treatment, preferably combustion.

The bottom product of the distillation column T2 is preferably withdrawn partially to completely, fed partially to completely into the evaporator Hv1 (stream 124), where it is evaporated as far as possible, and fed back into the lower section of the column again. Fractions that cannot be evaporated are preferably removed in stream 125. Stream 125 is fed either to disposal, preferably combustion, or to further processing (e.g. in order to obtain further valuable products such as the diphenylamine that is obtained as a secondary component in aniline production).

A further preferred embodiment of the process according to the invention is shown in FIG. 2, in which:

TABLE 2

Reference numerals of FIG. 2			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
21	Gaseous crude reaction product (crude aniline)	T1	Washer for dividing the crude aniline stream into PK and TK
22	Liquid process product (PK) discharged from T1	CC1	Condenser
23	Top product from T1	V1	Separator
24	23 after passing through CC1	S1	Splitter
25	Product stream fed back into the top of T1	C2	Cooler
251	Product stream split in S1 which is not fed back into T1	CC2	Condenser
26	22 after passing through C1	V2	Separator
261	26 after mixing with 213 (261 = "process product comprising PK")	C3	Cooler
27	Aqueous base solution for the treating PK or a process product comprising PK	D2	Decanter
28	Top product from V1	C1	Cooler
29	28 after passing through CC2	D1	Decanter
210	Top product from V2	H1	Preheater
211	Liquid process product (TK) discharged from V2	T2	Distillation column

TABLE 2-continued

Reference numerals of FIG. 2			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
2111	211 after mixing with the stream from C2	AT	Stripping section
212	Aqueous base solution for the treating TK or a process product comprising TK	VT1	Upper rectifying section
213	Aqueous phase from D2	VT2	Middle rectifying section
214	Organic phase from D2	Hv1	Evaporator
217	Organic phase from D1	C4	Cooler
218	Gas phase removed at the top of T2	CC3	Condenser
219	218 after passing through CC2	V3	Separator
220	Liquid condensate stream removed at the bottom of V3	H2	Preheater
221	Top product from V3	T3	Water stripper
222	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2	Hv2	Evaporator
223	Aniline stream from side withdrawal from T2 after passing through C4	C5	Cooler
224	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv1	CC4	Condenser
225	Discharged bottom runnings from T2	C5	Cooler
226	Aqueous phase from D1	CC4	Condenser
227	226 after passing through H2		
228	Top product from T3 (aniline-water azeotropic mixture)		
229	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv2		
230	Discharged bottom runnings from T3		
231	230 after passing through C5		

Unlike the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, the stream removed at the bottom of the separator V1 is here divided in the splitter S1 and only a portion (preferably from 5 to 99% by mass of the stream 9) is fed back into the top of T1 (stream 25). The remaining portion (stream 251), preferably after passing through a cooler C2, is mixed with the liquid process product (TK) removed as stream 211 from V2, and the mixture so obtained (stream 2111), preferably after passing through a cooler C3, is treated with aqueous base solution (212).

The water-rich stream 226 obtained in D1 is not fed to waste-water treatment as in FIG. 1 but, preferably after passing through the preheater H2, is passed into the top of the water stripper T3 (stream 227). In that manner, an aniline-water azeotropic mixture is obtained, which is removed at the top (stream 228), condensed in the condenser CC4 and mixed with stream 219. The bottom runnings from T3 are fed par-

tially via stream 229 to an evaporator Hv2, where they are fed back into the bottom section of T3 again. Waste water that remains (stream 230), after passing through the cooler C5, is disposed of, for example by combustion or in the clarification plant (stream 231). The energy input for the water stripper T3 and the distillation column T2 is preferably provided by means of steam, the steam used for T3 particularly preferably having a lower pressure than that used for T2.

The product stream originating from TK, which is passed into the top of the distillation column T2 above the uppermost rectifying section, is in this embodiment the organic phase obtained in D2 (stream 214). A decanter D3 is not necessary in this embodiment; stream 220 is passed into D2. Stream 214 in this embodiment preferably has a temperature of from 30° C. to 60° C. (analogously to stream 216 in FIG. 1).

A further preferred embodiment of the process according to the invention is shown in FIG. 3, in which:

TABLE 3

Reference numerals of FIG. 3			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
31	Gaseous crude reaction product (crude aniline)	T1	Washer for dividing the crude aniline stream into PK and TK
32	Liquid process product (PK) discharged from T1	CC1	Condenser
33	Top product from T1	V1	Separator
34	33 after passing through CC1	S1	Splitter
35	Product stream fed back into the top of T1	C2	Cooler
351	Product stream split in S1 which is not fed back into T1	CC2	Condenser
36	32 after passing through C1	V2	Separator
361	36 after mixing with 313	C3	Cooler

TABLE 3-continued

Reference numerals of FIG. 3			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
	(361 = "process product comprising PK")		
37	Aqueous base solution for treating PK or a process product comprising PK	D2	Decanter
38	Top product from V1	C1	Cooler
39	38 after passing through CC2	D1	Decanter
310	Top product from V2	H1	Preheater
311	Liquid process product (TK) discharged from V2	D3	Decanter
3111	311 after mixing with the stream from C2	T2	Distillation column
312	Aqueous base solution for treating TK or a process product comprising TK	AT	Stripping section
313	Aqueous phase from D2	VT1	Upper rectifying section
314	Organic phase from D2	VT2	Middle rectifying section
315	Aqueous phase from D3	Hv1	Evaporator
316	Organic phase from D3	C4	Cooler
317	Organic phase from D1	CC3	Condenser
318	Gas phase removed at the top of T2	V3	Separator
319	318 after passing through CC2	H2	Preheater
320	Liquid condensate stream removed at the bottom of V3	T3	Water stripper
321	Top product from V3	Hv2	Evaporator
322	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2	C5	Cooler
323	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2 after passing through C4	CC4	Condenser
324	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv1		
325	Discharged bottom runnings from T2		
326	Aqueous phase from D1		
327	326 after passing through H2		
328	Top product from T3 (aniline-water azeotropic mixture)		
329	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv2		
330	Discharged bottom runnings from T3		
331	330 after passing through C5		

This variant is a combination of those described in FIGS. 1 and 2, in which the stream 314 is washed in the decanter D3 with the runnings from the separator V3 (stream 320). Stream 320 originates in this process variant from the condensates from CC3 and CC4 combined in V3. The washing of stream 314 can be carried out with or without the addition of base, preferably without. In the case of washing with the addition of

base (not shown in FIG. 3), the same base as in the base treatment of stream 32 or (in the preferred embodiment) stream 36 is preferably used, but preferably in a considerably smaller quantity and concentration.

FIG. 4 shows an embodiment of the process according to the invention in which the base treatment takes place after the distillation, in which:

TABLE 4

Reference numerals of FIG. 4			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
41	Gaseous crude reaction product (crude aniline)	T1	Washer for dividing the crude aniline stream into PK and TK
42	Liquid process product (PK) discharged from T1	CC1	Condenser
43	Top product from T1	V1	Separator
44	43 after passing through CC1	S1	Splitter
45	Product stream fed back into the top of T1	C2	Cooler
451	Product stream split in S1 which is not fed back into T1	CC2	Condenser
48	Top product from V1	V2	Separator

TABLE 4-continued

Reference numerals of FIG. 4			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
49	48 after passing through CC2	C3	Cooler
410	Top product from V2	D2	Decanter
411	Liquid process product (TK) discharged from V2	T2	Distillation column
4111	411 after mixing with the stream from C2	AT	Stripping section
41111	4111 after mixing with 420	VT1	Upper rectifying section
413	Aqueous phase from D2	VT2	Middle rectifying section
414	Organic phase from D2	Hv1	Evaporator
418	Gas phase removed at the top of T2	V3	Separator
420	Liquid condensate stream removed at the bottom of V3	C5	Cooler
421	Top product from V3	D4	Decanter
422	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2	D5	Decanter
424	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv1	CC4	Condenser
425	Discharged bottom runnings from T2	T3	Water stripper
428	Top product from T3 (aniline-water azeotropic mixture)	Hv2	Evaporator
429	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv2	C7	Cooler
430	Discharged bottom runnings from T3		
432	Aqueous base solution		
433	Organic phase from D4		
434	Organic phase from D5 (=water-containing purified aniline)		
435	Aqueous phase from D4		
436	Aqueous phase from D5		

The product stream originating from PK, which is introduced into the lowermost section of the distillation column T2 between the lowermost stripping section and the section which follows, is in this embodiment identical with PK itself, that is to say it is the liquid process product discharged as stream 42 from T1. The product stream originating from TK, which is passed into the top of the distillation column T2 above the uppermost rectifying section, is in this embodiment, as in FIG. 2, the organic phase obtained in D2 (stream 414). In this variant of the invention, the aqueous phase from D2 (stream 413) is passed partially to completely into a water stripper (T3) in order to obtain an aniline-water azeotropic mixture (here 428). The aniline-water azeotropic mixture 428, after passing through the condenser CC4, is used for washing the total condensate in the decanter D2.

The bottom runnings of V3 (stream 420) are in this embodiment preferably mixed with stream 4111. The mixture so obtained (stream 41111) is passed into D2 as described above.

Aqueous base solution 432 is added to the distilled aniline 422. The process product so obtained is optionally mixed with aqueous phase from D2 (stream 413) and then, after passing through a cooler C5, passed into the decanter D4, where the acidic impurities are neutralised at temperatures of from 80° C. to 160° C. The aqueous phase from D4 (stream 437) is fed back into the top of T3. The organic phase from D4 (stream 433), which still contains a large amount of water, is passed via a cooler C7 into a further decanter D5 and subjected at from 20° C. to 40° C. to a phase separation in order to reduce the water content of the purified aniline (stream 434) as far as possible. The purified aniline 434 contains substantially only water, corresponding to the solubility of

water in aniline at the temperature in the decanter D5. Compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups and other secondary components are present in only insignificant amounts (<100 ppm, preferably <50 ppm, particularly preferably <25 ppm in total, based on the mass of the organic fraction of the stream 434). Depending upon the desired use of the aniline, it can either remain as such or be dried, preferably by stripping (not shown in FIG. 4).

The aqueous phase from D5 (stream 436) is likewise fed back into the top of T3.

The process according to the invention is distinguished from the prior art in that only a portion of the purified aniline has passed through the steps (i) condensation—(ii) evaporation—(iii) condensation again, and not, as is conventional in the prior art, the totality of the purified aniline. In the process according to the invention, only the fraction of the purified aniline that originates from PK has passed through steps (i) to (iii) completely. Only a portion of the fraction of the purified aniline that originates from TK, however, has passed through steps (i) to (iii). The fraction of the aniline contained in the product stream originating from TK and introduced into the top of the column above the uppermost rectifying section, which passes directly into the pure aniline stream, that is to say not via the streams 118/218/318-119/219/319-120/220/320 or 418/420/4111 is not evaporated again after the condensation (i). The fraction of aniline that is not evaporated again is preferably, depending upon the exact boundary conditions, from 65% by mass to 99.9% by mass of the total mass of the pure aniline stream (123/223/323 or 434 after drying). As a result, the outlay in terms of energy and apparatus and the thermal stress on the valuable aniline are reduced significantly.

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Furthermore, if required by the particular separation task in question, an effective reduction in the content of compounds having phenolic hydroxy groups in the purified aniline can be achieved in a simple manner by the described base treatment in combination with the described distillation.

The examples which follow describe the purification of a pure aniline which is flowing from a production installation at a mass flow rate of 35,000 kg/h and a temperature of 147° C. and which has the following composition:

TABLE 5

Composition of the crude aniline stream that is to be purified	
Component	Content in % by mass
Non-condensable gases	21.46
Low boilers	1.140

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on phenol. The distillation is carried out in each case using a column consisting of three sections (from bottom to top: lower stripping section (AT), middle rectifying section (VT1), upper rectifying section (VT2)), which has an evaporator Hv2.

## Example 1

Comparison Example: One Condensation Step, Base is Present During the Distillation. ASPEN Simulation

FIG. 5 shows the process used in this example. In the figure:

TABLE 6

Reference numerals of FIG. 5			
Material stream	Meaning	Apparatus	Meaning
51	Gaseous crude reaction product (crude aniline)	CC6	Condenser
510	Top product from V2	V2	Separator
511	Bottom runnings from V2	C3	Cooler
513	Aqueous phase from D2	D2	Decanter
514	Organic phase from D2	H3	Preheater
515	Aqueous phase from D3	T2	Distillation column
516	Organic phase from D3	AT	Stripping section
518	Gas phase removed at the top of T2	VT1	Upper rectifying section
519	Top product from T2 after passing through CC2	VT2	Middle rectifying section
520	Bottom runnings from V3	Hv1	Evaporator
521	Top product from V3	C4	Cooler
522	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2	CC3	Condenser
523	Aniline stream from side withdrawal of T2 after passing through C4	V3	Separator
524	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv1	D3	Decanter
525	Discharged bottom runnings from T2	T3	Water stripper
528	Top product from T3 (aniline-water azeotropic mixture)	Hv2	Evaporator
529	Recycle stream to the evaporator Hv2	C5	Cooler
530	Discharged bottom runnings from T3	CC4	Condenser
531	330 after passing through C5		
538	51 after passing through CC6		
539	Aqueous base solution		
540	Combined streams 514 and 539		
541	540 after passing through H3		

TABLE 5-continued

Composition of the crude aniline stream that is to be purified	
Component	Content in % by mass
Water	25.75
Aniline	51.51
Phenol	0.04
High boilers	0.1

In all cases, 32% sodium hydroxide solution was used as the aqueous base solution, in a stoichiometric amount, based

The following conditions were applied:

Temperature of the gas downstream of CC6 (stream 538): 60° C.

Number of theoretical plates of the upper rectifying section of T2: 10

Number of theoretical plates of the middle rectifying section of T2: 9

Number of theoretical plates of the lower stripping section of T2: 12

In this procedure, the crude aniline stream 51 is not subjected to fractional condensation but is condensed as completely as possible (more than 95% of the aniline) in one step in the condenser CC2. The process product so obtained



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(511—the “total condensate” of this process) is passed into a separator V2 for recycling of the uncondensed fractions to the hydrogenation process (via stream 510). The entire condensed crude product is cooled further in C3 and then subjected to a phase separation in the decanter D2. Sodium hydroxide solution (539) is supplied to the organic phase 514 so obtained. The NaOH-containing process product 540 so obtained, after passing through a preheater H3, is passed into the distillation column T2 between AT and VT1 (stream 541). Aniline (stream 522) is withdrawn as a side stream between VT2 and VT2 and a portion thereof is fed back into the column again. The fraction that is not fed back is cooled in C4, with the formation of steam, and withdrawn as a pure aniline stream 523. The mass flow of the bottom product, stream 524, is so adjusted that no phenolate salts precipitate in the bottom of T2. The gas phase carried off in T2, stream 518, is cooled to 55° C. in CC3 and passed into a device for separating gases and liquids (V3). The waste gas (stream 521) is fed to combustion. The liquid phase of V3 is separated in the decanter D3 into an aniline-rich phase and a water-rich phase. The aniline-rich phase is introduced into the top of the column T2 (516). The water-rich phases from D2 (stream 13) and D3 (stream 15) are passed into a water stripper (T3), which separates them into a water stream containing less than 100 ppm aniline (529) and a water-aniline azeotropic mixture (528). The latter is condensed in CC4(V) and fed to D3(V). The results are summarised in Table 7:

TABLE 7

Compositions of the streams and required energy input in Example 1			
	Stream <sup>[a]</sup>		
	510	523	525
Total mass flow	10506 kg/h	16935 kg/h	736 kg/h
Non-condensable gases	71.42%	0.00%	0.00%
Low boilers	3.29%	75.4 ppm	0.0 ppm
Water	21.29%	0.09%	0.00%
Aniline	4.00%	99.90%	93.42%
Sum of phenol and sodium phenolate	9.1 ppm	0.0 ppm	2.50%
High boilers	0.00%	0.0 ppm	4.08%
Temperature	60° C.	40° C.	144° C.
Energy input required for T2		5125 kW	
Energy input required for T3		3103 kW	

<sup>[a]</sup>Contents in % and ppm are always amounts by mass

As can be seen, this procedure involves evaporating the totality of the aniline again in order to separate it from the high boilers. Significant aniline losses via stream 525 also have to be accepted in order to avoid the precipitation of phenolate salts in Hv1. The energy input in T2 is higher than that in D3. That is particularly disadvantageous because steam of a higher pressure is required for the operation of T2 than for the operation of T3. The total energy input required for T2 and T3 is very high at 8228 kW.

## Example 2

According to the Invention: Two Condensation Steps, in Each Case a Basic Extraction and Neutral Distillation. ASPEN Simulation

This simulation was carried out on the basis of the process variant already explained in greater detail in FIG. 2 and

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above. 45% of the liquid condensed in CC1 is passed as stream 5 into the washer T1. The following conditions were applied:

Temperature of the gas downstream of CC1 (stream 24): 118° C.

Number of theoretical plates in T1: 6

Number of theoretical plates of the upper rectifying section of T2: 10

Number of theoretical plates of the middle rectifying section of T2: 10

Number of theoretical plates of the lower stripping section of T2: 11

Temperature in CC2: 60° C.

The results are summarised in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Compositions of the streams and required energy input in Example 2			
	Stream <sup>[a]</sup>		
	210	223	225
Total mass flow	9980 kg/h	17679 kg/h	62 kg/h
Non-condensable gases	75.17%	0.00%	0.00%
Low boilers	3.80%	20.2 ppm	0.0 ppm
Water	17.71%	0.09%	0.00%
Aniline	3.32%	99.90%	51.42%
Sum of phenol and sodium phenolate	9.1 ppm	4.2 ppm	0.11%
High boilers	0.00%	1.7 ppm	48.47%
Temperature	60° C.	40° C.	156° C.
Energy input required for T2		1673 kW	
Energy input required for T3		3251 kW	

<sup>[a]</sup>Contents in % and ppm are always amounts by mass

As can be seen, the use of the process according to the invention leads to a significant reduction both in the energy consumption in T2 and in the aniline losses via stream 225. The total energy consumption in T2 and T3 is only 4924 kW, as compared with 8228 kW in the comparison example. The product quality differs only in that traces of phenolate salts may occur in the product, but still in an acceptable amount. The following example shows how such traces can be reduced to an insignificant value.

## Example 3

According to the Invention: Two Condensation Steps, in Each Case a Basic Extraction and Neutral Washing Before the Distillation. ASPEN Simulation

This simulation was carried out on the basis of the process variant described in FIG. 3 and already explained above. The other conditions are the same as in Example 2. The results are summarised in Table 9.

TABLE 9

Compositions of the streams and required energy input in Example 3			
	Stream <sup>[a]</sup>		
	310	323	325
Total mass flow	9980 kg/h	17679 kg/h	62 kg/h
Non-condensable gases	75.17%	0.00%	0.00%
Low boilers	3.80%	19.0 ppm	0.0 ppm

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TABLE 9-continued

Compositions of the streams and required energy input in Example 3			
	Stream <sup>[a]</sup>		
	310	323	325
Water	17.71%	0.09%	0.00%
Aniline	3.32%	99.90%	51.44%
Sum of phenol and sodium phenolate	9.1 ppm	0.1 ppm	0.10%
High boilers	0.00%	1.7 ppm	48.47%
Temperature	60° C.	40° C.	156° C.
Energy input required for T2		1659 kW	
Energy input required for T3		3332 kW	

<sup>[a]</sup>Contents in % and ppm are always amounts by mass

As can be seen, the pure aniline stream **323** is now virtually free of phenol and phenolate impurities. The total energy consumption in T2 and T3 is only 4991 kW, compared with 8228 kW in the comparison example.

## Example 4

According to the Invention: Two Condensation Steps, in Each Case a Basic Extraction and Neutral Washing Before the Distillation, Smaller Distillation Column. ASPEN Simulation

This simulation was likewise carried out on the basis of the process described in FIG. 3. In this example, column T2 has fewer plates.

Number of theoretical plates of the upper rectifying section of T2: 9

Number of theoretical plates of the middle rectifying section of T2: 6

Number of theoretical plates of the lower stripping section of T2: 2

The remaining parameters are the same as in Example 3.

The background to this example is to show that the number of plates in T2 is a variable which can be optimised. The process according to the invention especially allows the number of plates to be reduced and accordingly the production and fixed costs also to be lowered.

The results are summarised in Table 10.

TABLE 10

Compositions of the streams and required energy input in Example 4			
	Stream <sup>[a]</sup>		
	310	323	325
Total mass flow	9980 kg/h	17679 kg/h	62 kg/h
Non-condensable gases	75.17%	0.00%	0.00%
Low boilers	3.80%	19 ppm	0.5 ppm
Water	17.71%	0.09%	0.00%
Aniline	3.32%	99.90%	51.46%
Sum of phenol and sodium phenolate	9.1 ppm	0.1 ppm	0.09%
High boilers	0.00%	0.8 ppm	48.44%
Temperature	60° C.	40° C.	156° C.
Energy input required for T2		1659 kW	
Energy input required for T3		3333 kW	

<sup>[a]</sup>Contents in % and ppm are always amounts by mass

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As can be seen, the lower number of plates is entirely sufficient. The content of high boilers in the pure aniline stream **323** is even reduced as compared with Example 3. The total energy consumption in T2 and T3 is only 4992 kW, compared with 8228 kW in the comparison example.

The invention claimed is:

1. A process for producing aniline by gas-phase hydrogenation of nitrobenzene and subsequent purification of the aniline, comprising:

obtaining a gaseous crude reaction product, which is subjected to fractional condensation such that at least two liquid process products are obtained, wherein the at least two liquid process products include at least one partial condensate (PK) and a total condensate (TK),

carrying out a condensation leading to the formation of PK at a temperature that is higher than the condensation temperature leading to the formation of TK,

passing a product stream originating from PK and a product stream originating from TK into a distillation column comprising at least two sections, comprising at least one stripping section and at least one rectifying section,

introducing the product stream originating from PK into a lower section of the distillation column between a lowermost stripping section and a section which follows, and introducing the product stream originating from TK into a top portion of the distillation column above an uppermost rectifying section, and

withdrawing distilled aniline in a side stream between the lowermost stripping section and the uppermost rectifying section of the distillation column.

2. The process according to claim 1, wherein: the condensation leading to the formation of PK is carried out at a temperature from 60° C. to 160° C., and the condensation leading to the formation of TK is carried out at a temperature from 25° C. to 90° C.

3. The process according to claim 2, wherein: product stream originating from PK is a partial condensate obtained in fractional condensation, and product stream originating from TK is an organic phase which is obtained by phase separation of TK and/or a process product comprising TK into an aqueous phase and an organic phase.

4. The process according to claim 2, wherein: product stream originating from PK is an organic phase which is obtained after mixing PK and/or a process product comprising PK with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and an organic phase, and

product stream originating from TK is an organic phase which is obtained after mixing TK and/or a process product comprising TK with aqueous base solution and subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and an organic phase.

5. The process according to claim 1, wherein: product stream originating from PK is a partial condensate obtained in a fractional condensation, and

product stream originating from TK is an organic phase which is obtained by phase separation of TK and/or a process product comprising TK into an aqueous phase and an organic phase.

6. The process according to claim 5, wherein aniline withdrawn from the distillation column in a side stream is mixed with aqueous base solution, and an aniline depleted of acidic impurities is obtained by phase separation.

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7. The process according to claim 1, wherein:  
 product stream originating from PK is an organic phase  
 which is obtained after mixing PK and/or a process  
 product comprising PK with aqueous base solution and  
 subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and  
 an organic phase, and  
 product stream originating from TK is an organic phase  
 which is obtained after mixing TK and/or a process  
 product comprising TK with aqueous base solution and  
 subsequent phase separation into an aqueous phase and  
 an organic phase.
8. The process according to claim 7, wherein:  
 PK and/or the process product comprising PK is mixed,  
 before, during and/or after mixing with aqueous base  
 solution, in a single- or multi-stage process with water  
 and/or with a stream A comprising at least 50% by mass  
 water, based on the total mass of stream A.
9. The process according to claim 8, wherein:  
 stream A comprising at least 50% by mass water is an  
 aqueous phase which is obtained after mixing TK and/or  
 a process product comprising TK with aqueous base  
 solution and subsequent phase separation into an aque-  
 ous phase and an organic phase.
10. The process according to claim 7, wherein:  
 the organic phase obtained after mixing TK and/or a pro-  
 cess product comprising TK with aqueous base solution  
 and subsequent phase separation is washed in a single-  
 or multi-stage process with water and/or with a stream B  
 comprising at least 50% by mass water, based on the  
 total mass of stream B.
11. The process according to claim 10, wherein:  
 stream B comprising at least 50% by mass water is a liquid  
 condensate stream of gas phase removed at a top portion  
 of the distillation column and/or a process product com-  
 prising a liquid condensate stream of gas phase removed  
 at the top portion of the distillation column.

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12. The process according to claim 11, wherein  
 the process product comprising the liquid condensate  
 stream of the gas phase removed at the top portion of the  
 distillation column is obtained  
 by adding an aniline-water azeotropic mixture,  
 obtained by introducing into a water stripper an aqueous  
 phase obtained by phase separation after mixing PK  
 and/or a process product comprising PK with aqueous  
 base solution,  
 to total condensate of gas phase removed at a top portion  
 of the distillation column.
13. The process according to claim 7, wherein:  
 TK and/or process product comprising TK is mixed,  
 before, during and/or after mixing with aqueous base  
 solution, in a single- or multi-stage process with water  
 and/or with a stream B comprising at least 50% by mass  
 water, based on the total mass of stream B.
14. The process according to claim 13, wherein  
 stream B comprising at least 50% by mass water is a  
 process product comprising liquid condensate stream of  
 gas phase removed at a top portion of the distillation  
 column.
15. The process according to claim 14, wherein:  
 the process product comprising the liquid condensate  
 stream of the gas phase removed at the top portion of the  
 distillation column is obtained  
 by adding an aniline-water azeotropic mixture,  
 obtained by introducing into a water stripper an aqueous  
 phase obtained by phase separation after mixing PK  
 and/or a process product comprising PK with aqueous  
 base solution,  
 to total condensate of gas phase removed at a top portion of  
 the distillation column.
16. The process according to claim 7, wherein the aqueous  
 base solution comprises a solution of an alkali metal hydrox-  
 ide and/or alkaline earth metal hydroxide.

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